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Impossible Journey

The Liminality of Female Heroes

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1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Western culture privileges a developmental model of adolescence that favours white, able-bodied males – to the detriment of adolescent females (cf. Fausto-Sterling; Feldman and Elliot; Katchadourian; Lesko; Gilligan). Moreover, it is a narrative that hero-stories have delineated¹ even before G. Stanley Hall's landmark two-volume study *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (1904) brought the category 'adolescence' into discursive existence. Through the archetypal hero – who is adolescent – both hero-stories and hegemonic adolescent developmental models (be they based in the biological or in the social) maintain heteronormative values and ideals, while also reinforcing patriarchal duties such as heterosexual unions and normative gender roles. The adolescent becomes a stable, heterosexual adult, a process the hero-story narrates through its focus on

1 For more detailed descriptions of the hero journey, see Campbell; Dundes; Rank. Hourihan makes explicit the link between adolescent and hero, as does Proukou in her concern with young adult literature.

Dr Leah Phillips recently completed her PhD with the University of Warwick. This project, “Myth (Un)Making: Female Heroes in Mythopoeic YA Fantasy”, reads how this vein of speculative fiction contests dominant, hegemonic ideals of being an adolescent girl, particularly focusing on constructions of the body made possible by the fantastic nature of these texts. Her current research interests include YA literature and “speaking” adolescent girl.

the hero winning the princess's hand in marriage. These two journeys chart the same hegemonic story, and it is a male-centric one.

Within the frames of hero-stories and hegemonic developmental models, the body marks the adolescent/hero as adolescent/hero. As this article will demonstrate, the adolescent is perceived to be adolescent because of pubertal bodily changes, and the hero is hero in large part because of his bodily strength and potency, characteristics also associated with the ideal adolescent body. Yet, both refuse the body's fleshiness and materiality in favour of a discursive privileging of strength, stability, homogeneity, and wholeness, and they do so because of an underlying structure of binary opposition that privileges mind over body, male over female, linearity over cyclicity, and individuality over relationships. Unequal in weight, these binary pairs posit one side as superior to the other, and this superiority depends on a clearly defined blank space between the pairs. Paradigmatically, the fleshy material body is refused because it is not mind, the superior position, and because the adolescent girl is becoming-woman – with concomitant shape-changes – she is linked to the body to a degree her boy counterparts are not, despite the body's centrality to both male and female adolescence.

In *Puberty in Crisis: The Sociology of Early Sexual Development* (2015), Celia Roberts discusses the tension between puberty (physical bodily changes) and adolescence (a psycho-social discursive field). Through the lens of the crisis (discursive) around “early onset puberty” (the biological) – what is commonly referred to as “precocious puberty” – Roberts delineates not only how adolescence, as a discursive period, has historically been anchored in the bodily changes of puberty but also, and particularly, how girls – more so than boys – experience problems in relation to this figuration (4). This refusal of the body – as fleshy, material and changeable – is key. The adolescent girl's heightened association with the body is not only the mechanism by which she is excluded from the hero paradigm, but it is also that by which hegemonic developmental schemes mark her as adolescent and limit her potential.

I see a subtle difference between ‘female adolescent’ and ‘adolescent girl,’ a difference articulated along the lines of puberty/adolescence. I associate the first with the physical changes that demarcate a period between childhood and adulthood and the second with the discursively constructed creature. It is a difference along the lines of sex and gender, as described by Judith Butler. Yet, herein lies the problem: not only are those physical changes capricious, but our understanding of them is just as culturally constructed as this idea of ‘adolescent girl’ I

am attempting to separate out through the distinction. Moreover, this defining comes with all the usual risks of homogenisation. However, not only is this naming crucial for improving the adolescent female's position within hegemonic regimes, but in recognising bodily instability and liminality as a fundamental aspect of her discursive construction, I hope this reading opens a frame in which bodies offering other kinds of difference may be considered.

Through two instances of bodily instability – becoming-woman and shape-shifting – in Tamora Pierce's quartets *Song of the Lioness* (1983–1988) and *The Immortals* (1992–1996), this article traces the ways in which the female heroes within these texts collapse the structure of opposition underpinning traditional conceptions of the hero-journey. I also explore the ramifications of this on conventional adolescent development models, which are tied to the mythic journey narrative, an argument that Katherine Proukou makes in “Young Adult Literature: Rite of Passage or Rite of Its Own” (2005). As an example of mythopoeic young adult (YA) fantasy – a vein of speculative fiction demonstrating a creationary or world-building mind-set – these texts offer sub- or counter-cultural spaces in which alternative frameworks for living and being an adolescent female are possible. Drawing on the deconstructive work of Margery Hourihan, and feminist writing, in particular the work of Luce Irigaray, this article argues that mythopoeic YA fantasy written by women and for adolescent girls offers bodily multiplicity, difference, and instability. Rather than a “conceptual centre” of binary opposition that insists upon individuality, isolation, and linear progression (Hourihan 15), mythopoeic YA fantasy speaks from the spaces between oppositions to make a space for ‘sheroes,’ female heroes who are not trapped in, or limited by, their bodies. In so doing, these texts offer a relational model of self that demonstrates how individuals may be “scored into uniqueness” through relationality (Battersby 7), thus complicating the notion of journey formulated by heroic patternings.

2 THE HERO WHO IS ADOLESCENT

I mean to shew that ‘Hero-worship never ceases,’
that it is at bottom the main or only kind of worship.
(Carlyle n.pag., emphasis in original)

In *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature* (1997), Margery Hourihan devotes an entire chapter to the figure of the hero, discussing seven

aspects of the figure: “race” (58), “class and mastery” (62), “gender” (68), “age” (72), “relationships” (76), “rationality” (88), and “action and violence” (96). While the last three focus on his journey – and would thus seem highly relevant to this article – I want to focus on the first four, because these characteristics of the hero engender the limiting nature of his journey, as his heterosexual relationships, the rationality of his journey and its concomitant action and violence demonstrate.

Conventionally, the hero is a young, white man who is of some standing. He is also fit, as in physically able (often also attractive), and together these characteristics produce a bodily stability underscoring every aspect of the hero. For example, Hourihan suggests that the “hero is white” (58), and this whiteness establishes – in terms of race – a kind of stability, the hero’s skin colour does not change. The hero’s elevated class, and its attendant position of authority over others, stems from the “god-touched” aspect of mythic patterns.² Moreover, this elevated position is, at least partly, bound up in – or made possible by – his skin colour. As Hourihan suggests, this characteristic speaks to the hierarchies embedded within the hero story, and as “hierarchies are images of order”, the hero embodies order, another kind of stability (65). Concerning gender, Hourihan writes, “heroes are traditionally male and the hero myth inscribes male dominance and the primacy of male enterprises” (68). However, I contend that, more than “traditionally”, the archetypal hero *is* male, just as much as he *is* white. Finally, while the hero is generally considered to be youthful, Hourihan argues, “the archetypal hero is not merely young, he is essentially adolescent” (74), thus overtly linking the hero to adolescence.

As Hourihan asserts, the above are the defining characteristics of the archetypal hero, I, however, wish to draw attention to one more: bodily stability. Bodily stability not only underscores each of Hourihan’s features, but an assumed bodily stability and wholeness also underscores consensus views of the archetypal hero, despite a lack of acknowledgement. However, neglecting to make bodily stability an explicit characteristic of the hero allows for both it and concomitant bodily wholeness to remain unquestioned. In a synecdochal exchange, hero and bodily stability and wholeness are one and the same, because without a stable body, there is no hero, as the few instances of bodily instability in traditional hero narratives make explicit. In these narratives, bodily instability either questions the hero’s very being ‘hero’ or signals his death. For example,

2 Rank first suggested that the hero is “child of distinguished parents” (65) and it was with Lord Raglan’s expansion of Rank’s project (taking the “hero” markers from twelve to twenty-two) that “hero reputed to be the son of a god” entered the pattern at number five.

Catherine Batt argues that an injury to Sir Gareth's thigh, in Malory's "Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney," indicates the hero is no longer acting heroically; he has engaged in "sexual activity [that] constitutes a moral transgression" (270) and has, thus, failed in his heroic duty. Beowulf, the heroic deliverer of King Hrothgar's halls from the terror of the monstrous Grendel, is another example: in all his battles, Beowulf is never injured until – in old age and in meeting the dragon – it is his time to die:

Beowulf was foiled
of a glorious victory. The glittering sword,
infallible before that day,
failed when he unsheathed it, as it never should have.
(Donoghue 65, lines 2583–2586)

The failing of his sword – that is to say his strength, his body – precipitates death, the ending of the hero and the heroic journey. The failing body is another kind of bodily instability, yet because it runs counter to the hero-paradigm, it, alongside other forms of bodily instability, is ignored when discussing the hero-as-hero. The hero is bodily wholeness, and I contend this insistence on bodily wholeness – an insistence that is so pervasive its implications are elided – is that which excludes females from 'being-hero'.

This exclusion is the result of a "conceptual centre" of binary oppositions (for example, man/monster, male/female, good/evil, active/passive and us/them) that speaks to the maintenance of the status quo, while also giving form to both hero and journey (Hourihan 15). As Hourihan further suggests, "[h]ero stories inscribe the male/female dualism, asserting the male as the norm, as what it means to be human, and defining the female as other – deviant, different, dangerous. The essence of the hero's masculinity is his assertion of control over himself, his environment and his world" (68–69). Control is the essence of the hero's masculinity, the essence of his very self, his being-hero, and the body is the primary site of control. It is that which must be controlled first, before the land, monsters, or others. For, if the hero does not control his own body, how can he control anything else?

3 MAPS OF ADOLESCENCE: THE HERO-JOURNEY AND HEGEMONIC DEVELOPMENT MODELS

Mythic narratives – of which the hero story is one dominant thread – and contemporary Western models of adolescent development – a discourse anchored in, and often conflated with, the science of pubertal bodily development – would seem diametrically opposed. As a system of belief, mythos is at once ‘lie’ and ‘truth,’ an irrational explanation of the world and a divine utterance with a sacred meaning (cf. Lincoln). Science is presented as fact, systematically proven and defended. Yet, in the case of the hero and the adolescent, the two discourses are not so far removed. As I argue in more detail elsewhere, the patterning of the hero journey, offered by “hero pattern” research, bears a striking similarity to longitudinal studies of pubertal bodily development and the psycho-social descriptions of adolescence resulting from those studies (Phillips, “Mapping YA Fantasylands”).³ With the hero, or adolescent male, at their centre, these two discourses delineate a linear transition from not-hero/child to hero/adult, at the exclusion of the adolescent girl.

Beginning with the hero, Otto Rank’s *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909/1914) is a foundational study of the hero in the field of hero pattern research. For Rank, the hero story is motivated by the child’s desire/need to “move on” from the authority of the parents, “oblig[ing] the hero to sever his family relations” (66). In other words, myth is the private family drama – the child severing ties from his parental home so that he may establish his own – made manifest across cultures and throughout history, an assertion Joseph Campbell’s comparative mythological work makes clear. Campbell’s most well-known contribution to this field is the monomyth – the basic pattern of “separation–initiation–return” – that provides the linear framework for hero stories. Despite the appearance of cyclicity – the hero departs and returns – the individual hero experiences it as a linear model: untested, he “ventures forth”, conquers, and returns – with the “power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (Campbell 30). Thus, this is not a return unchanged, it is a return with power, and often a bride. Through the lens of Campbell’s monomyth, and as Rank illustrated above, the hero-journey is essentially about the perpetuation of patriarchy (status quo) through the slaying of monsters and through marriage.

3 Hall’s work on defining the adolescent and these early forays into “hero patterning” occurred at the same time – the first decade of the twentieth century – though in America and Europe, respectively.

Crucially, this pattern engages what the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep first described, in *The Rites of Passage* (1909/1960), as ritual transference. The hero's journey and the discursive period of adolescence describe the liminal stage between the comparatively stable states of childhood and adulthood. Specifically, and in van Gennep's focus, the hero's journey and adolescence are specific manifestations of the ritual process of transference, the process that sees the initiate, in my case the hero/adolescent, as existing between states; they are neither one (the child) nor the other (adult). In so being, the adolescent, as well as the hero when he is on the journey, embodies a kind of structural impossibility, as Victor Turner illuminates. Focusing on the ritual transference of an individual from one state – the “relatively fixed or stable condition” between which the liminal person exists – to another (235), Turner suggests, “the subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, ‘invisible’” (235). The structure of binary oppositions cannot account for the adolescent's – or hero's or initiate's – actions when he is in the liminal period, that is, on the journey. Thus, the classical mythological hero must embody stability and certainty, lest the structure come undone. Compellingly, this pattern bears a striking resemblance to adolescent developmental models.

Conventionally described in the West as a linear progression out of childhood and into adulthood, adolescent development is defined, and shaped, by biological determinism. In fact, Hall heralded puberty as adolescence's initial maker, without considering how uncertain this start is: precocious puberty (early on-set) or the late-bloomer (late start) demonstrate how the beginning of puberty may be fraught (cf. Roberts), and as it lacks a biological marker, adolescence's ending is even more uncertain (cf. Wallis). Yet, biological determinism, problematic as it is, does not just define adolescence. Biological processes also ‘drive’ the action forward. This view is at the centre of conventional understandings of adolescence, and it is one that excludes social (discursive) processes or, at best, relegates them to a peripheral position (cf. Feldman and Elliot; Katchadourian; Fausto-Sterling). In this vein, adolescence is underpinned by what Julian Wood calls an “ideology of emergence” (73). That is, through a “paradigm of biological causation,” that Nancy Lesko further describes as a “linear, unicausal model” (151), adolescence, and the (hetero)sexual maturity that the period is seen to produce, is posited as natural and naturally occurring, without consideration of the social or discursive.

Following Lesko, I contend that the problem with the conventional and typical construction of adolescence is that, in being “universal, timeless and massified”

(152), the specificity of adolescence in different cultural spaces, as well as the difference in the ways in which development occurs, is elided. Moreover, many developmental models – biological and psychosocial – implicitly posit a white male as the ideal subject of this process, using, for example, linearity of biological causation to exclude female adolescents from the “normal” models – because “the fluctuations of women’s systems,” that is the unpredictability of her reproductive system, render her “naturally abnormal” (Lesko 151). She is abnormal because of the “naturalness” (i.e. uncontrollability) of her body, a refusal reflected in, and naturalised by, the hero story.

4 FROM HEROES TO ‘SHEROES’

Mythopoeic YA fantasy offers alternatives to these dominant hegemonic narratives. While I focus on selected texts from Pierce’s Tortall Universe, mythopoeic YA fantasy has existed since the early 1980s, when Pierce, but also Robin McKinley, began writing. More recent offerings include, for example, the works of Alison Croggon, Kristin Cashore, Sarah J. Maas, Rachel Hartman, and Erika Johansen. Although many of these texts construct a pseudo-medieval world, there are examples that consider non-Western locations, such as the works of Roshani Chokshi, Marissa Meyer, Alison Goodman, Leigh Bardugo, Alwyn Hamilton, Evelyn Skye, and Sabaa Tahir. Imperatively, mythopoeic YA fantasy is not the speculative fiction of Stephenie Meyer’s *The Twilight Saga* (2005–2008) or Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* series (2008–2010), as these texts operate within their own subgenres – while also recapitulating dominant, limiting narratives of female adolescence. Through the creationary mind-set of mythopoeic YA fantasy, female heroes, or sheroes, as they have been described on a message board Pierce co-founded with children’s and YA author Meg Cabot (“About Us” n.pag.) – take a different position in relation to hegemonic norms, through a positive engagement of liminality. Rather than opposing liminality (by embodying bodily stability), these female heroes refuse opposition by incorporating liminality into, and onto, their bodies. In so doing, mythopoeic YA fantasy’s female heroes occupy the spaces between binary pairs.⁴

Thus, while the hero journey is problematic, mythopoeic YA fantasy uses it to write itself *into* mythic narratives. In other words, mythopoeic YA fantasy offers

4 I offer a more sustained defining, and reading, of mythopoeic YA fantasy in “Myth (Un)Making: Female Adolescence in Mythopoeic YA Fantasy”.

hero stories: “an idea made her jaw drop: if she’s a legend, and a hero, then anyone could be a hero” (Pierce, *Wild Magic* 61); even when those heroes turn up in the most unlikely of ways: “Oh, wonderful. You’re on a hero’s quest to get rid of bullies” (Pierce, *First Test* 149). Thus, while the hero – or ‘shero’ – may take a different shape or earn their title fighting “bullies”, he or she is still a “hero”. If actions merit the title: “She’s a hero. She’s proved it over and over” (Pierce, *First Test* 165). Crucially, in the process of “prov[ing]” their heroic status, Alanna of Trebond and Olau (Alanna/Alan), and Veralidaine Sarrasri (Daine) – the female heroes of Pierce’s *Song of the Lioness* quartet and *The Immortals* quartet, respectively – do so while navigating bodily instabilities. Not only does this include the liminal within the heroic frame, thus complicating the linear journey between oppositional poles (not-hero/hero and child/adult), but it also makes a space for the female body that is excluded because of its propensity to change and its alignment with the fleshy. This is fundamental for improving the situation of adolescent girls existing outside of these texts, something Victoria Flanagan suggests is a “vital aspect of maturation within representations of adolescent femininity in young adult (YA) fiction” (“Girl Parts” 40).

Yet, heroes to ‘sheroes’ is not an easy transition to make, and even Pierce’s work, for all that it does to expand the notion of the hero, is not without flaws. For example, Pierce’s *Song of the Lioness* quartet – her first quartet within the Tortall Universe – appears to evoke a superficial conversation with myth: Alanna is quite literally shoved into the role of hero, as she cross-dresses, becoming Alan, so that she – as he – may try for her shield in order to become a knight. Flanagan discusses Alanna’s cross-dressing at length in *Into the Closet: Cross-Dressing and The Gendered Body in Children’s Literature and Film* (2007). Through Alanna’s cross-dressing, this quartet essentially replicates Campbell’s hero-journey: “ventur[ing] forth”, Alan encounters many “fabulous forces” (Campbell 30), including malevolent spirits in the “Ysander” (Pierce, *In the Hand* 40), a human villain in Roger (*In The Hand* 15), and a mythical foe in the “God of the Roof” (*Lioness* 175). With each, s/he is victorious, and for so being, s/he is blessed and granted a boon by the Goddess, “wear my token, and be brave” (*In the Hand* 18). Alan’s final victory, within the separation-initiation-return framework, occurs with Chitral (the “God of the Roof”) with whom she battles to win his Dominion Jewel (*Lioness* 175). When in the hands of a natural leader, this Jewel grants fabulous power, for good or evil. Upon returning home to Tortall, Alanna gifts the Dominion Jewel to King Jonathan of Conté (her former fellow page, knight master, and lover). At a time of great peril, Jon uses it to save the kingdom, while Alanna is busy battling

Roger who, in turn, is attempting regicide. On the surface, Alanna's narrative is a straightforward replication of the monomyth, particularly in that she cross-dresses to participate in the male world of knighthood.

5 BECOMING-WOMAN, WHILE BECOMING-HERO

Alanna's hero journey is, however, more than a simple, superficial replication of the hero story, as, despite the disguise, her female body cannot be completely ignored: "Suddenly she froze before her long mirror. Watching the glass closely, she bounced up and down. Her chest moved. It wasn't much, but she had definitely jiggled. Over the winter her breasts had gotten larger" (Pierce, *Alanna* 106). Alanna's transition into womanhood begins with a physical, bodily transformation, a theme Daine's shape-shifting, changing into the animals with who she shares a bond, expands by taking 'normal' bodily shape-change into the realm of the fantastical. Here, this very mundane bodily shape-change includes instability of body within Alanna's hero narrative, and in so doing, it expands the archetype, while also commenting on the 'problem' of the female body within hegemonic regimes: the body must be controlled and contained. This is particularly true for Alanna, as she refuses her female body in becoming Alan (her cross-dressed persona): "[i]t wasn't easy to live with the binding on her chest. For one thing, her growing breasts hurt, though luckily they remained quite small. She was twice as careful now about how far she opened her shirt" (107). Alanna has taken on the subjectivity and subject position of Alan (the ideal of hegemonic discourse) and as such, she must keep her 'larger' breasts hidden.

This is key: adolescent girls outside of the text – as they are 'required' to wear bras, for example – experience the same kind of bodily refusal that Alanna demonstrates to a heightened degree because of her disguise. For example, in a story for *Seventeen* magazine, Hannah Orenstein writes about how Kaityn Juvik, a senior at Helena High School in Montana, was sent home from school for not wearing a "bra underneath her black, off-the-shoulder tee, though she was wearing nipple stickers to prevent them from showing through the material of her t-shirt" (n.pag.). The 'nipple stickers' were not enough. Juvik's uncontained (with the confines of a bra) breasts made "someone [...] uncomfortable", as Principal Steve Thennis reported to KRTV, an NBC news affiliate (Owsalt). Like Juvik, Alanna must keep her "chest" hidden, though in Alanna's case it is because "her growing breasts" would reveal her disguise (Pierce, *Alanna* 107). Her growing

breasts would reveal that she is, in fact, not Alan, not male. The explicit engagement of breasts as a problem Alanna must overcome makes visible, as it were, the refusal of the female body within hegemonic discourse, as Juvik's story exemplifies.

While Alanna's development of breasts and subsequent binding describes one aspect of bodily containment, the suppression of Alanna's female body reaches a heightened state at the time of menarche. Disguised as a boy and without a mother to explain menarche, Alanna finds it a horrifying occurrence: "[s]he got out of bed – and gasped in horror to find her thighs and sheets smeared with blood. She washed herself in a panic and bundled the sheets down the privy. What was going on? She was bleeding and she had to see a healer; but who?" (*Alanna* 132). Thus, the narration of this aspect of Alanna's transition into womanhood begins with her seeking the help of a "healing woman", as "she was bleeding [...] from the secret place between her legs" (132-3). Masquerading as boy, Alanna seeks the help of this healing woman because, in this moment of arguably heightened femaleness, she does not know her body. Illustrating the refusal of the female body within hegemonic discourse, the disguise appeals to a visual representation of this lack, a lack of "access to the signifying economy" of femininity (Irigaray 71). Alanna "remains an outsider", the epitome of being "subject[ed] to their [masculine] norms", and in this time of crisis, the physicality of the body is not enough: she lacks the ability to read, to understand, its signification (71). Without that ability, "the horror of the blood", as Irigaray describes menstrual blood under hegemonic regimes, is reiterated (228). Thus, to neutralise the horror a rearticulation of the body must occur, which is precisely what these texts offer. Here, an older woman, who is also a healing woman, provides the signification that Alanna lacks, "'you poor child', she chuckled. 'Did no one ever tell you of a woman's monthly cycle? The fertility cycle?'" (Pierce, *Alanna* 136). The woman provides access to the "signifying economy" of femininity (Irigaray 71).

Finally, while, as I discuss below, this cycle is crucial in frustrating the economy of opposition present in dominant narratives, it also illustrates how these texts offer alternatives to the refusal of the female body: Alanna is a hero – or is, at least, on a hero journey – while her body (and possibly her self) is becoming-woman. The liminality of transition, along with a concomitant possibility of multiplicity, is made explicit. Yet, these fantasy texts do not only challenge the hegemonic discourse in such 'normal' ways. Pierce's Tortall Universe, the Secondary World in which these mythopoeic YA fantasy texts are set, also features

fantastical bodily transformations, transformations that push the boundaries of not just what it means to be hero and female, but also human.

6 BODILY MULTIPLICITY

This incompleteness in her form, her morphology, allows her continually to become something else, though this is not to say that she is ever univocally nothing.

(Irigaray 229)

Daine, the shape-shifting heroine of Pierce's *The Immortals* quartet, is not entirely human: her mother is a mortal and her father is Weiryn, god of the hunt. Daine is the child of a human and a god, and as such, she is both human and animal. Because her god-father is affiliated with animals, Daine "may look like a human", but she is also "of the People: the folk of claw and fur, wing and scale" (*Wolf-Speaker* 70). This complex layering of being – female, human, and animal – complicates hegemonic figurations of the hero by including multiplicity and difference within the heroic frame, especially when Daine shape-shifts, and as with Alanna's narrative, the text does so by showing how difficult it is to incorporate bodily mutability within hegemonic structures.

Daine initially rejects being "of the People" (animals within this world): "[i]mpossible,' the girl said flatly. 'Look at me. I'm pink, my fur's patchy, I walk on two legs. I'm human, human all over'" (70), because she does not look the part, she is "pink," with "patchy fur" (hair), and "two legs". In many ways, her position marks the expected position of the adolescent girl within contemporary Western, popular culture: you are who you appear to be (while everyone experiences this to a certain extent, I believe adolescent girls do so to a heightened degree). However, Daine is both human and animal and, thus, the narration establishes appearance as unreliable: the body's surface, Daine's "look[ing] human" (70) while being "of the People", of the animal (70), frustrates the assumed one-to-one relationship between self (being) and body (appearing), at least until she shape-shifts. While shape-shifting makes her internal being available on the body's surface, it does not simply invert the one-to-one relationship between self and appearance; rather, shape-shifting offers "mutation, variation, and becom-

ing” (Seaman 247). For example, “she [Daine] looked at her hands and feet. They were still human but a fine grey fuzz covered them and the tips of her nails were black claws” (Pierce, *Wolf-Speaker* 213). Daine’s body is constructed as unstable, for change is introduced onto its surface.

This narration establishes what that change is by defining what does not change: the ‘human’ that somehow exists before, and yet also after, change has occurred. The narration of bodily transformation, in other words, establishes an opposition between changed and not changed, while, simultaneously, questioning it. For, by remaining “human”, despite being “covered” and despite “black claws”, in short, despite changes to her human form, the “hands and feet” in their “not changed” states appeal to a stable core, a core of “human” that has somehow not changed during this transformation. Shelley Chappell engages this issue through the example of how, within Pierce’s *The Immortals* quartet, “death detaches the core of a person from their material body in the human realm” and yet “continuous identity is manifested in the afterlife through an identical replacement of the body left behind” (125), a point she makes through the narration of Daine and Numair meeting with Daine’s deceased mother when they are sent to the Divine Realms in *The Realms of the Gods*. Daine’s mother died, and her body was buried in the human realm, but here, in this space of afterlife, it still exists. Chappell thus suggests, “bodies [...] clearly form and express a large portion of people’s continuous identities” (125), as Daine’s mother has maintained her body through life and death.

However, Daine’s ability to shape-shift complicates matters. Her ability to shape-shift – to change the shape of her body, or that which should express some portion of her identity, in Chappell’s terminology – complicates not only the bodily stability of the hero but also the concomitant assumption that the body should represent a single, identifiable self. Daine’s shape-shifting is about demonstrating how an unchanging core is impossible to maintain. The notion is too rigid; change influences and modifies both the body and the core, as “they [Daine’s hands and feet] were still human but” (Pierce, *Wolf-Speaker* 213, emphasis added) – “but” calls any stability of the body or otherwise into question. “But” introduces the possibility that neither complete change nor complete non-change has occurred thus calling both into question. Daine’s hands and feet that are simultaneously human and not-human unite the opposition between human/not-human, or animal. In other words, while the hands and feet are claimed to be “still human”, “a fine grey fuzz” and “black claws” are not human. Although the fuzz and claws are now connected to the hands and feet (to that which is “hu-

man”), they potentially jeopardise her humanness. Daine’s shape-shifting literalises the liminality of, and the bodily instability associated with, the adolescent girl, while also speaking to the liminality associated with the period of adolescence.

Thus, while the narrations of Daine’s shape-shifting initially appear to solidify the underlying binary opposition of non-change/change, close reading illustrates the complexity of the relationship between what are perceived to be oppositions; in much the way Alanna’s cross-dressing appears to offer a superficial rearticulation of the hero journey, only to complicate it by insisting upon the femaleness of her body. These bodily changes are not about a complete transformation; they are about complicating that strict opposition, and the quest for definite stability – in either state (boy/girl, girl/woman, human/animal) – “becomes a game of Chinese boxes” (Irigaray 134). For both protagonists, each new layer or partial shift offers a potentially new (yet related) body. The development of Alanna’s breasts, which are always already present, offers a new version of her body, not an utterly new one, just as Daine’s transformations into People (animals within this world) offer alternative versions of her body/self. For both Alanna and Daine, the body changes, and yet it still serves them on their heroic-journeys. In fact, their changing bodies offer a rearticulation of the female body and the journey, as well as the self, as it is produced in relation to the body and through the journey.

7 A RELATIONAL MODEL OF SELF

The Tortall Universe features female heroes who frustrate the system of binary oppositions underscoring hegemonic discourse. In interviews, Pierce has suggested: “fantasy, along with science fiction, is a literature of possibilities. It opens the door to the realm of ‘What If,’ challenging readers to see beyond the concrete universe and to envision other ways of living and alternative mindsets. Everything in speculative universes, and by association the real world, is mutable” (“Fantasy” 50, emphasis in original). Mythopoeic YA fantasy opens spaces in which bodies demonstrating difference are possible and in which economies of opposition are frustrated, offering real avenues for alternative models of adolescent development. In many ways, I believe the “conceptual centre” of mythopoeic YA fantasy is *possibility*, not the binary oppositions Hourihan defines as traditional myth’s “conceptual centre” (15).

Thus, in this concluding section, I want to outline a relational model of self that – by operating within the system, from the blank spaces between oppositions – has the potential to collapse opposition, offering a positive rearticulation of female heroes and development for adolescent girls. This model uses images of relation to frustrate the economy of opposition dominating the hero-journey and hegemonic adolescent developmental models, because relation refuses binary structures. Through images of connection and repetition, both of which contribute to relation, this reading serves as a model for how a self might be conceived in relation to, and as interdependent on, other selves, while also always demonstrating how relationality can produce the uniqueness so central to hegemonic narratives of self – without the exclusionary practices of that discourse.

Firstly, the conversation that explains Alanna's menarche is a narrative of transition, a distinctly female 'ritual transference,' which is significantly constructed in terms of plurality, not the isolating individuality required by hero narratives. The conversation between Alanna and the older woman discussed above develops the importance of relation by insisting that this bleeding is something shared by women, as a further exchange between Mistress Cooper and Alanna demonstrates: "'That's what this is? It's normal?'" (Pierce, *Alanna* 136). In answer, "the woman nodded. 'It happens to us all. We can't bear children until it begins'" (136). Importantly, this is not to say that all women experience this bleeding or that they experience it in the same way; it is, rather, that menstrual blood, the physical material thing, offers connection, if discursive constructions will only take it up. Typically, they do not, as Alanna's subject-position as Alan illustrates. Faced with this bodily function – this aspect of being-female – Alan, as the ideal of hegemonic models, cannot apprehend the meaning of the bleeding. Thus, for Alanna to come into her full self, to become Alan(na) – a version of herself incorporating both Alan and Alanna – menstruation must be acknowledged. The being-female – and being so in the company of other women – must be acknowledged.

This connection offered by the narration of menstruation also employs repetition, on at least two levels. First, this is a monthly cycle; it repeats. Moreover, it has the potential to (re)produce (other) children, at least until it ends – it is both a reproduction of the child and a production of other children. In relating the "it" (the bleeding) to "bear[ing] children", narration not only relates the cycle to something outside of itself – another kind of making normal through linking – but it also produces a repetition that problematises the linearity of dominant conceptions of development. In other words, Alanna is narrated as be-

ing a 'child,' though one transitioning into 'womanhood,' and this cycle constructs her as now being able to bear other children, to perpetuate the cycle and to produce multiplicity of self. This perpetuation of the 'child' through the bearing of other 'children' constructs the cycle as at once ending and never ending. While Alanna, as a specific woman, may one day be 'too old,' the story of the cycle – as that which happens to all women – constructs that cycle as never ceasing. The cycle, and its story, will continue long past specific endings. Hence, the narration offers cycles (repeats monthly) within cycles (the bearing of children), modelling a kind of spiral of identity in the process. This is about, as Irigaray suggests, "frustrate[ing] the opposition through the economy of repetition" (77). Repetition is not linear, which problematises traditional developmental models that are based on linear development through time, and it speaks to a kind of interdependency that contributes to the relational model of existence with which I am concerned. Repetition refuses autonomy, since without links between occurrences there would be no repetition

A return to Daine's fantastical shape-shifting makes this argument explicit, as in the first instance of sustained, albeit partial, bodily transformation, Daine's ears become those of a bat, after she joins with the mind of Wisewing, a member of the "Song Hollow Colony of bats" (Pierce, *Wolf-Speaker* 144): "Her ears were tired and sore, the muscles round them cramped from use. Reaching up to rub them, Daine touched a long flap of leathery skin that flicked to and fro, catching each quiver of sound in the air" (151). Initially, this transformation is bound up in issues of possession, of that which belongs to Daine ("her ears") and that which does not ("the long flap of leathery skin"). This hers/not hers opposition plays into the economy of self through appearance underpinning contemporary Western culture. The ears are hers, but they are also her – through belonging, her ears identify her. Yet the simple inclusion of these other ears on Daine's body insists that they too, somehow, belong to her – or, at least, that they are also a part of her – likely, owing to her internal "being of the people" (Pierce, *Wild Magic* 70). The surface of the body is here a place of amalgamation. Its liminality is made explicit, as one final transformation makes clear, while also offering implications for rethinking the structure of binary oppositions and speaking to the in-betweenness of adolescence. At the end of her quartet and when she is at the height of her powers, Daine can transform into multiple birds, at once: "There was no one bird that she drew on, but many, as Daine shaped angled wings to give her speed, a ripping beak and talons to match for combat, a starling's talent for quick midair dodges. She stayed as large as she dared" (*The Realms* 249). Daine is, here, quite

literally “of the People” (animals within this world). Her shape-shifting is, in this transformation, very much about expressing multiplicity. Not only does it further blur the distinction between human and animal, a blurring that Daine embodies, but it also blurs the differences between different kinds of birds: this is an amalgamation of “no one bird” as well as of no particular bird (249). Apart from the starling, the text does not name the birds whose appearance Daine takes on, and even with the one it does name, Daine does not take on its appearance but, rather, an attribute: the bird’s “talent.” In terms of the bodily transformations, Daine is “no one bird.” For readers in the United Kingdom this is particularly poignant, as “bird” is commonly used to indicate a girl or woman – *human* females – evidencing one further example of how these texts might hail a reader outside of the text, while also problematising binary oppositions.

8 CONCLUSION

Alanna and Daine’s narratives are about making visible human bodies that are formed in multiplicity as well as about speaking from between poles of opposition, an “inter-dict” (a functioning between states), according to Irigaray (22). Alanna’s narrative does this by having Alanna transition into womanhood while cross-dressed, and Daine’s by having Daine embody multiplicity whilst always persisting as ‘Daine.’ Their bodies become signs, signifying meaning beyond the superficial. For this reason, I offer Elizabeth Grosz’s use of the Möbius strip as a way of concluding as it demonstrates a means of conceiving of the body as a limen, a thing between binary pairs: “The Möbius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another” (xii). While Grosz is concerned with the specific binary of mind/body, this inflection modelled by the Möbius strip also describes the body’s liminality, while refusing to privilege one side over another and also demonstrating interdependence. In its liminality (between self/other, inside/outside, child/woman, human/animal), the body is a Möbius strip. It is both this and that, surface and depth, self and other, and for the adolescent girl a reconceiving of the body is crucial, as the body is the very site of her othering, her exclusion from dominant models.

The introduction of in-betweenness has implications for rethinking the structure of binary oppositions, while also speaking to the “in-betweenness” of adolescence. In dominant hegemonic discourses, the liminality of the adolescent

girl produces a silence in relation to the body. This silence happens in two ways: *between* oppositions, because the adolescent girl is neither child nor adult, and *within* oppositions, because the adolescent girl is becoming-woman; she is physically shape-changing into woman, and ‘woman’ is the other of the paradigmatic man/woman binary. Alanna’s cross-dressed body that experiences menarche, offers multiple bodily instabilities: it is a female body that appears male, a bleeding body, and a body that is possibly more than one. Daine’s shape-shifting offers an ambiguous body, while also questioning the boundary between human and animal. Through their heightened embodiedness, these bodies demonstrate the self in relation to not only other humans but also animals. This interdependency is critical, as it contests the individuality that is the goal of the hegemonic developmental models of adolescence. Moreover, these ‘sheroic’ bodies featuring multiplicity and change contest singularity while also demonstrating that a unique and individual self remains within – and because of – connections with other bodies and selves. They demonstrate how a self might be “scored by relationality into uniqueness” (Battersby 7), while simultaneously demonstrating how the conventional journey is impossible for adolescent girls, and also offering ways – by engaging liminality, change and difference – the archetypal hero journey might change to include them.

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